Our New City in Allendale
In February, 2002, the People of Praise sent Nick Holovaty, Sean Connolly and me out to look for a unique place. As a community, we had discerned that the Lord wanted us to build a city—a city of God, a place that he loves for the people he loves. Paul DeCelles told us, “Go and look for what moves your heart, because that is what moves the Father’s heart.”

We found Allendale, and our hearts were not only moved, they were captured. The aging live oak trees, the narrow roads, the red clay, the hills and bayous, the way the sun filters through the trees and mist at 5:30 in the morning, the children playing hopscotch and tossing footballs in vacant lots, the smell of dew on the boxwood, magnolias blooming in February—Allendale is a place that inspires loyalty and fierce love.

Our wonderful neighbors and our beautiful neighborhood have since captured the hearts of the hundreds of People of Praise members who have traveled here to help build our city. For those of you who can’t come in person (but we’d love it if you could), for those of you who support us with your money and your prayers, and for all of you who keep us in your minds and in your hearts, here is an issue of Vine & Branches devoted to Allendale.

This young and growing city is the work of all of us in the People of Praise, and those lucky few of us who get to live here want to share as much of our experience as we can with every one of you, our brothers and sisters. I would especially like to thank and honor Gretchen Rolland and Cathy Grill, who took close to 700 photographs, making it possible for Allendale to shine on these pages.
“No longer will you be named Forsaken; no longer will your land be called Abandoned; but you will be called My Delight and your land Espoused. For Yahweh delights in you and will make your land his spouse.”

(Isaiah 62:4)
As this roof collapsed, a mother and her children escaped unharmed.
More than 40 churches call Allendale home. These four are some of the closest churches to our houses on Yale Avenue. The closest, Mt. Sinai, is a stone’s throw from our houses, while the farthest, Galilee, is just a five-minute walk. Clockwise from the top left: Mt. Sinai Baptist Church, Hurricane Bluff Baptist Church, Carroll Temple Church of God in Christ, Galilee Baptist Church.
“Dear Friends, . . . After seeing you build on the lots I have had for over forty years, I am beginning to see a marvelous future for mankind. I can see a new world established and the foundation of this new world being laid at the corner of Dunlap and Yale, free from wickedness, free from suffering. . . .”

Our friend G.L. Pearrie wrote us that letter just a few months after selling us eight beautifully kept lots on Yale Avenue. The three of us who lived here then were staying in a rental house a few blocks away. Our first house on Yale was still under construction. We didn’t know any of our neighbors. We didn’t even know our way around town. I got lost trying to drive the first Action team to the hardware store.

It took eyes of faith for G.L. Pearrie to see the new creation in us and in what we had begun. Having eyes of faith, he was able to prophesy truly.

Four years later, we can all see what the Lord has done.

Our little community on Yale is growing. There are 10 of us who have moved here from various branches of the People of Praise. We are joined by our four newest members, neighbors and friends who have come underway in the People of Praise: Ruth Christor, her daughter Val Chatman (who brings along her six children), Mike Williams and Kedrick Stacey.

We now have built five houses on Yale.

Our first People of Praise business opened last December. Windows, Doors and More Outlet generates funds for the building of our city in Allendale and employs three of our neighbors, Ron Seitz, Mike Williams and David Zimmel.

Together, we make up two women’s groups and one men’s group. We meet on Mondays for prayer, discussion and teaching, and again on Wednesdays for supper. We host outreach meetings on Thursdays, where we offer teachings to neighbors interested in the community.

We work together on a daily basis visiting our neighbors, running our business, planning and preparing for our busy summers, and discussing how to keep the People of Praise in Allendale growing.
From left: Ron and Ruthanne Seitz’s house, the single women’s house and the single men’s house—three of the five new homes we’ve built since 2002.

Below: A Monday night People of Praise meeting inside the single men’s house.

Above: Ruthanne and Ron Seitz in their kitchen.

Right: Connie Chatman, a freshman at Booker T. Washington high school, shows off her JROTC uniform.

Below: This empty lot is the site for our sixth house. (See p. 12 for details.)

“They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant crops and eat their fruit.”
(Isaiah 65:21)

Below, from left, Val Chatman, two of her six children, Connie and Larry, and her mother, Ruth Christor.
Above: Bruce Johnson.

Right: Diane Burks proudly displays her refrigerator gallery.

Above, from left: Angel, Angela and Brittney. Below: Carolyn Hawkins rejoices in the new windows we installed in her home.

Above: Charlene Stewart (right). Below: Crossing guard David Powell.
Timmy is one of Bertha Debrow’s grandchildren.

Joe Willis (left) and J-T Kelly.

Below: Lenell Johnson.

G.L. Pearrie, barber and famed storyteller, sold us his property on Yale Avenue.

Above: Bertha Debrow. Right: Rosie Battle admires the new screen door we helped install.

“Be glad forever and rejoice in what I create; for I create Jerusalem to be a joy and its people to be a delight. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people. (Isaiah 65:18)
Last summer, the People of Praise and Action spent 5,000 hours repairing 15 of our neighbors’ houses. We replaced water-damaged sheetrock, repaired foundations, installed new doors and windows, laid vinyl flooring in bathrooms and kitchens, built a wheelchair ramp and fixed a lot of leaky plumbing.

We wanted to make improvements that would better our neighbors’ daily lives, making their houses more affordable, more secure, more stable or, quite simply, more pleasant.

One neighbor, Rosie Battle, said her monthly water bill dropped $30 after we replaced the leaky faucets in her kitchen and bathroom. Also, Rosie’s back door didn’t have a lock or a working handle, and the wall holding it up was sagging. So we replaced the wall and the door together. “I feel more secure,” she says, and adds that she is less concerned about burglaries than before.

Another neighbor, Carolyn Hawkins, whose brown two-story house now has seven new windows, says, “The windows make my house look more like a home. It looks more comfortable. This is something my family had wanted to do for a long time.” Carolyn lives in the same house she grew up in, now with her own daughters and granddaughter. “They say God answers prayers,” she says. “He certainly answered one of mine.”

Repairing homes gave our neighbors and us a new way to get to know one another. We have many new friends now, and the Lord has given us many new opportunities to love and to be loved. Octavia Hunter, who lives on Harvard Street, put it this way, “Y’all have brought new air into the neighborhood. A lot of us are glad to have you around. We needed you here.”
Above: Kevin Winnike cooks a mere fraction of the 100 pounds of chicken served at this cookout. Upper right: Tom White pokes his head through a carport roof on West Gary Street.

“They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.”
(Isaiah 61:4)

Above, from left: Evan Lent, Brian Couch, Kevin Winnike and Ethan Hatch pause after building a wheelchair ramp outside a home on Yale Avenue.

Bertha Debrow (left) regularly served a hot lunch to the crew of volunteers working on her block.

Michael Rose smiles beneath a home on Walnut Street.

Lisa Ficker (right) enjoying the Cat’s Cradle with a summer camp participant.

Above: Liz Loughran (left) and Allesha Lattimer mud the walls of a home on Yale Avenue.
In 2006 we’re going to build house number six and do repairs on neighbors’ homes. The sixth house, at 2,400 square feet, will be 50% larger than the previous five. Its high-ceilinged main room will allow plenty of space for our growing meetings, while the other rooms will give us space for offices and a library. We hope, too, that this house will eventually become a home for a community family.

Over the next year, we plan to purchase many more empty lots so that we can continue building homes in upcoming summers. The City of Shreveport has made it possible for nonprofit organizations to acquire abandoned properties inexpensively. We have filed for 47 such properties, all within a five-minute walk of Yale Avenue. Currently we are waiting for our applications to be approved.

Our plans for the coming year are only the beginning. When our Father told us to build a city, he meant it. He wants more homes, more businesses, more men’s groups and women’s groups. He wants schools, parks, clinics, well-paved streets, well-lit streets, safe streets. He wants to see our foundation rise up and become a new city, spreading out across the neighborhood. He wants us to join his Son in building the city of God.

Above: Gretchen Rolland painted this watercolor representation of our sixth house. The high-ceilinged front area will provide space for our growing People of Praise meetings and for meetings of our summer Action teams. We hope a community family will live in this house in the future.

These are a few of the more than 100 empty lots and abandoned buildings within a three-minute walk of our Yale Avenue houses.
“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them.’”

(Revelation 21:2-3)
The Spirit of the Lord God is upon us,
because he has anointed us to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent us to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives, freedom to the drug addicts,
freedom to the alcoholics, freedom to the abused and the left behind,
and to the orphaned child, new mornings!
And to the legions of men beating down a path to the liquor store,
liberty and a purposeful life.
He has sent us to bring recovery of sight to the blind,
healing for the sick,
healing for the diabetic,
healing for the heart-conditioned,
a wake-up call to the bedridden,
a get-up call to the paralyzed, the maimed, the amputated,
and to the forever-laboring women, weary from years of care,
the alarm-clock jolt of salvation.

To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor;
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort those who mourn;
to comfort those who mourn in Allendale,
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit,
medicine instead of sickness,
speedy clinics instead of all-night lines at the ER,
new houses instead of crumbling shacks,
new schools instead of new prisons,
new grass instead of new weeds,
fields of flowers in place of fields of broken glass,
fields of employment in place of fields of desolation,
tree-lined sidewalks in place of dark alleys,
healthy children in place of orphans,
live music instead of live bullets,
driveways instead of drive-bys,
open doors instead of boarded-up windows,
light instead of darkness.
That they may be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.
They shall build up ancient ruins.
They shall raise up former devastations.
They shall repair ruined cities and every gaping roof,
broken staircase, pockmarked street and cracked sidewalk.
Fallen houses shall be raised up and every crack house,
crack head lair and hooker hotel shall be torn down to the ground,
the devastation of many generations.

For behold, I am building a new Allendale;
and the former things—the liquor store shootings, the robberies,
the male prostitutes in drag on Sprague Street,
the women lingering on the Portland Street bridge,
the skeletons drinking 40s from paper bags on Pierre Avenue
at 7:00 in the morning,
the five-block walk to the bus stop when you’re
seven months pregnant and it’s 89°
and you’re the only one bringing home a paycheck
for a household of five—
no, the former things shall not be remembered
or even come into mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create;
for behold, I create in Allendale a rejoicing,
and in her people, a joy.

I will rejoice in Allendale,
and be glad in my people;
no more shall there be in her an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not fill out his days
for the child shall die a hundred years old,
and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.
You shall build houses and inhabit them;
you shall build schools and learn in them;
you shall build hospitals and be healed in them;
you shall build businesses and spend your days in them;
you shall pave roads and drive on them;
you shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit;
you shall not build and another inhabit;
you shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a live oak tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
You shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity,
for abandonment or fear,
for welfare checks or sex;
for you shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord,
and your children with you.
You shall live together in a new Allendale,
and in a new Allendale you shall fill out your days. ■